

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 12, 2005

Senator Arlen Specter  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services  
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Tom Harkin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services  
186 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Harkin:

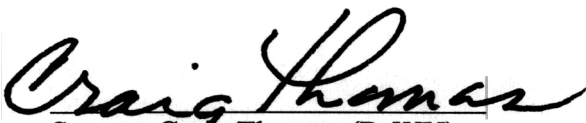
As members of the Senate Rural Health Caucus as well as other interested Senators, we are writing to ask that you retain the Senate-passed funding levels for rural health programs when the conference committee resumes negotiations on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

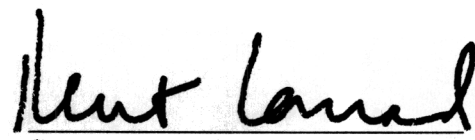
As you know, the FY 2006 budget blueprint included a \$100 million rural health amendment which restored full funding for several important rural health initiatives such as the rural health flexibility grant program, rural health outreach grants, the small hospital improvement program, telehealth, trauma care, and rural access to emergency devices programs.

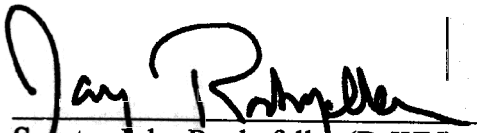
While current spending for all rural health discretionary programs is relatively small, it plays a critical role in solidifying the fragile health care infrastructure common in rural communities. Through your leadership and support, funding for these programs was maintained in the Senate during this year's appropriations process. We understand the current constraints on the federal budget and recognize the need to eliminate wasteful and inefficient programs. However, we also believe that we must continue to support government policies that work.

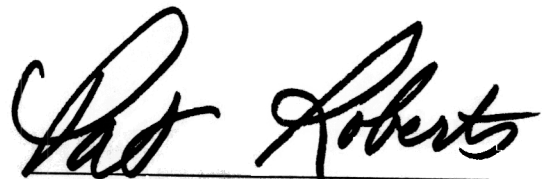
Maintaining fiscal discipline is a top priority and we want to work with you toward that goal. However, we respectfully request that you consider the important role these programs play in rural communities as the conference committee prepares to report the "Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 2006."


Sincerely,


  
Senator Craig Thomas (R-WY)


  
Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND)

  
Senator John Rockefeller (D-WV)

  
Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS)

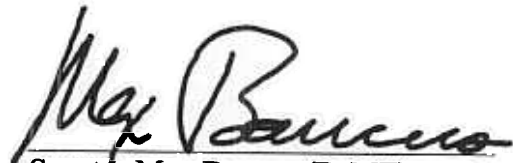
  
Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT)

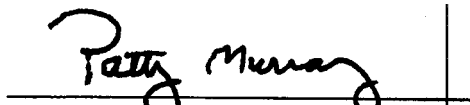
  
Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)

  
Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA)


  
Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM)


  
Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)

  
Senator Max Baucus (D-MT)

  
Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)

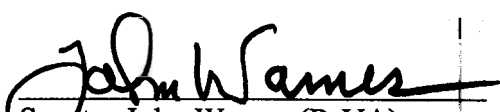
  
Senator Jim Talent (R-MO)

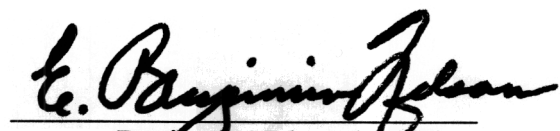
  
Senator John Thune (R-SD)

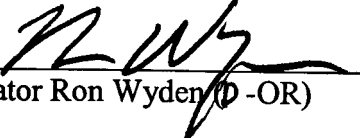
  
Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD)

  
Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD)

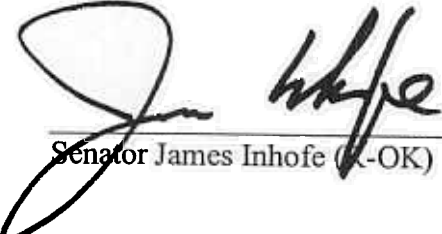
  
Senator Robert Bennett (R-UT)

  
Senator John Warner (R-VA)

  
Benjamin Nelson (I-NE)

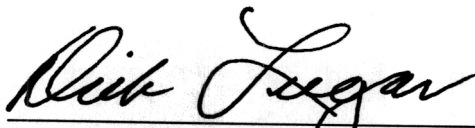
  
Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR)


  
Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS)

  
Senator James Inhofe (R-OK)


  
Senator Mark Dayton (D-MN)


  
Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO)

  
Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN)

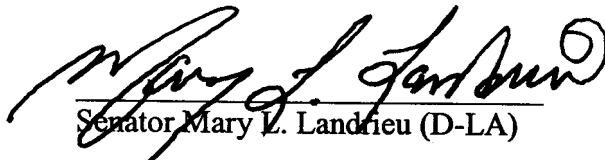
  
Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN)

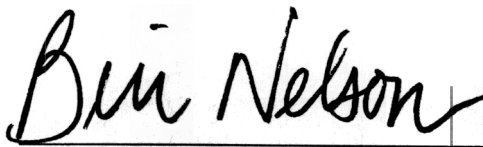
  
Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)

  
Senator Mark Pryor (D-AR)

  
Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC)


  
Senator Michael B. Enzi (R-WY)

  
Senator Mary L. Landrieu (D-LA)

  
Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL)

  
Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR)

  
Senator James Jeffords (I-VT)

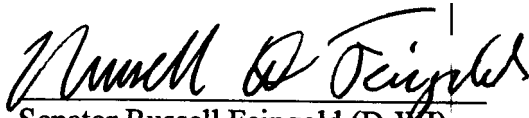
  
Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE)



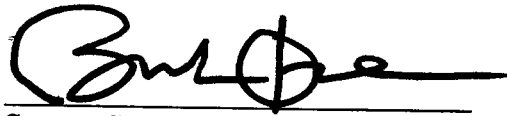
Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT)



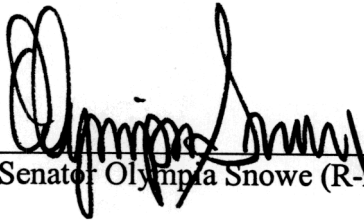
Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND)



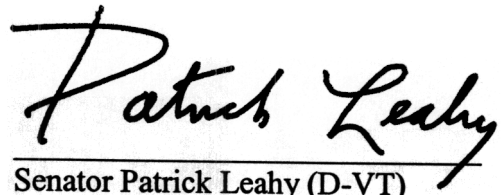
Senator Russell Feingold (D-WI)



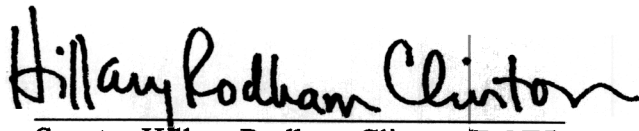
Senator Barack Obama (D-IL)



Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME)



Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)



Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY)